

Grieving a Miscarriage

What Should I Tell My Child?

Written by Clara Hinton | Mar 05, 2003

When a miscarriage occurs, probably one of the most difficult and most painful tasks is that of breaking the news to family members and friends that the baby you had once been so excited about is now only part of a broken dream. Most parents feel overwhelmed and lost when they are faced with telling their living children that there will not be a little baby brother or sister—at least not just yet. Parents are left wondering what do you say? How do you tell a young child that a loss has occurred?

First of all, don't try to be a hero and hide your own feelings. It's okay to say that you are sad. Children identify with feelings and they often know that you are feeling sad or lonely without you ever saying a word. It is often more frightening to a child to wonder what is going on than to actually know that mommy and daddy are feeling very blue.

You don't have to go into a deep theological explanation about the loss. In fact, many times you will feel as though you have no logical answers about the loss. It's okay to simply explain that baby brother or baby sister is no longer inside mommy's tummy, but is now in a different safe place with God. Try not to use words or terms above the age level of the child's understanding. Especially remember that when a child learns about death, it is an abstract idea and often an impossible concept for a young child to comprehend. Try to keep your explanation simple.

Don't imply that the miscarried baby went to sleep to be with God. That can be scary to any young child. When nighttime comes, there might be a real fear that if mommy or daddy falls asleep, they will go away, too. Again, be careful what words you use when explaining death to a young child.

Try to be honest, and identify with something familiar to the child. Perhaps the child has had a baby kitten that died. The feelings of sadness and loneliness will be easily identifiable, and the child will understand that while he will always remember the little kitten, the kitten is no longer living with him. That explanation will help the child understand the concept of missing someone through death.

Allow the child to talk and ask questions. Children will ask questions that are age appropriate, so that makes explaining the loss a little easier. It is not necessary to go into gestational age development when a child doesn't have a clue. That explanation can come at a much later time.

Leave the door open for future questions and be watching for any signs of anxiety or depression. Because parents are often caught up in their own feelings of loss and grief, it's a good idea to have a trusted and loved aunt, uncle, or grandparent to pay close attention to your child's needs. Feelings are real. When a child feels alone and afraid and is unable to express those feelings, additional problems in the grief process can arise.

What is best? Keep it simple and speak from the heart. When you say, "Mommy is so sad because our baby stopped growing and is now living in heaven. But, I'm so happy that we are together", then you have ended on a positive note. Chances are your child will readily express his or her feelings of grief more openly with you, and together you can work through this pain of loss. Healing is a process, and it takes time for you and your child. Together you will make it!

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Mother's Day With Empty Arms

Written by Clara Hinton | Apr 25, 2002

Experiencing a miscarriage is devastating. Hopes and dreams of a baby are snatched away so suddenly. Many mothers have an extremely difficult time accepting the fact that one day there was a baby growing inside of them, and the next day the baby is gone.

Facing special holidays without a baby is terribly painful, often causing a heightened grief. One of the most painful of all holidays to face with empty arms is Mother's Day.

There is no simple solution for decreasing the emotional pain of child loss, especially during a holiday such as Mother's Day that is specifically designed to honor mothers. A mother can, however, make some preparations for that day in an attempt to work through her grief rather than facing this holiday with an anticipated dread.

Probably the best gift a mother can give herself is the acknowledgement that she is a mother, even though she is not carrying her baby around in her arms. Most friends and many family members will avoid the topic because it makes them feel too uncomfortable. However, a mother can plan ahead for this holiday by letting others know of her wishes to be included among those being honored as mothers.

If a mother who has suffered a miscarriage feels uncomfortable about being given a flower in church, or by attending a Mother's Day banquet, then she can substitute other activities that make her feel more comfortable during this difficult time.

Mother's Day is a great time for a husband and wife to spend time together talking about their loss and what the baby meant to them. Perhaps a planned walk in the park seeing and hearing the sights and sounds of nature—God's creation—will be what a mother needs as her special encouragement. This is a good reminder that God has not abandoned them in their grief.

A husband and wife can verbalize their lost dreams together. There is great healing within a marriage when a husband and wife can talk together about their baby. This is another way of allowing a mother who has miscarried to really “feel” like she is a mother. Validation is an important part of grief healing, and is so important on a holiday such as Mother’s Day.

If you have not named your baby who was lost to miscarriage, Mother’s Day is a great day to think about doing this. There is healing in giving your child a name. Often fathers will not be ready to do this, or they might not see a reason to name a miscarried child. A mother can name her baby and keep the name in her heart. She needs to hear words other than “it”, “tissue”, or “fetus”. There is something very special when a mother can call her child by name.

Finally, a mother who has miscarried should give herself permission to do what feels best for her heart to do on Mother’s Day. She can write a love letter to her baby. Perhaps she will want to plant a flower in memory of her baby. She might want to plan a time for a balloon release on Mother’s Day, giving her baby permission to “be away” while she remains the child’s mother.

Mother’s Day is not a day to mask feelings. By planning ahead to do just one thing that will validate being a mother, Mother’s Day will have special meaning, and moving ahead in the slow, difficult journey of grief can continue in a very positive way.

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My Body Is Grieving

Written by Clara Hinton | Feb 10, 2002

When a miscarriage occurs, there are several very abrupt changes that take place with a woman. Emotionally, a woman must relocate her thinking from pregnant to not pregnant. This sounds easy to do, but it can take months for a woman to completely get her mind to accept the fact that she is no longer in a pregnant state.

Linked together with the emotional grief that takes place when there is a miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, or stillbirth, is the physical grief that a mother will experience. Often, a mother feels the real presence of “body grief.”

During pregnancy, a woman’s body is changing rapidly. She stops menstruating. Her breasts become tender and swollen. A mother will experience hormonal changes that will bring about nausea. She will experience extreme fatigue because of all of the changes taking place.

If the pregnancy has progressed beyond 8 weeks, the mother will notice an enlargement of the uterus. She might experience some slight swelling in her hands and feet, and she can even feel a nagging ache in her back. All of these are very real reminders that the body is pregnant.

When miscarriage, stillbirth, or an ectopic pregnancy takes place, all of these changes that are taking place in a woman's body now have to do a quick reversal—back to being not pregnant. The body will go through what some have termed “body grief.” Body grief affects a woman who has had an abortion or who gives up her baby for adoption, too.

What is “body grief”? Body grief is that sudden adjustment to hormonal levels and bodily changes. The intensity of body grief will be determined by how far along a mother was in her pregnancy. Was she 6 or 8 weeks pregnant, or did she deliver an 8-month stillborn baby?

Body grief might include cramping as the uterus shrinks back to a non-pregnant size. There might be feelings of faintness and some sweating as hormone levels are rapidly changing. The pregnancy hormone levels must now fall back down to zero in order to eliminate all body grief.

Body grief will occur as the breasts go back to normal size. Breasts might leak as they return to a non-pregnant state. And, a woman will often experience body grief when menstruation occurs following a miscarriage or other child loss. The return of menstruation is the final reminder that there is no longer a viable pregnancy.

Body grief is real, and a woman should be encouraged to talk about the grief she experiences when a miscarriage or other early child loss has taken place. This type of physical grief might last as long as 6 – 8 weeks. Most likely, though, most of the physical symptoms of a pregnancy will disappear in 4 weeks. The more difficult part is getting the mind to cooperate with the body. Many women refuse to believe that their pregnancy has ended. This denial can last for several months, and is generally helped when a woman allows herself to accept the “body grief.”

By allowing yourself to recognize the reality of body grief, a woman is working through the difficulties of grief towards hope and healing. Body grief is real. Allow yourself to grieve the pregnancy loss. By grieving the loss, you are taking one step forward on the journey of grief.

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This Isn't Fair!

Written by Clara Hinton | Oct 15, 2001

Miscarriage is a thief that comes breaking through the door of our hearts unexpectedly! When miscarriage occurs, a child is snatched away so quickly, and we are left feeling abandoned and totally alone in our grief.

Many couples have great difficulty conceiving. There is tremendous stress placed on a husband and wife when they go through fertility testing, monthly charting, and multiple visits to the doctor sharing details of intimacy in an attempt to conceive. When a pregnancy finally does take place, there is great joy. The couple feels like shouting the news “We are finally pregnant” from the rooftops for the entire world to hear.

So often, couples are unexpectedly hit with the devastation of miscarriage. The baby that they tried so desperately to conceive was taken away in an instant. What took months and months of tears, prayers, and pleas to God ended abruptly, and the couple is left brokenhearted, sobbing the words, “This isn’t fair. Nothing about this miscarriage is fair.”

The topic of fairness in life is an age-old point of discussion and one that will not be satisfactorily solved through the words on this page. I can say, though, that I would never dispute the fact that life holds a great deal of unfairness. An especially sensitive issue is the area of child loss. Everything about a child dying seems completely unfair.

The idea of unfairness in life can cause grief issues to magnify. Life is unfair in many, many ways. A most difficult fact to accept is the unfairness of many of the issues of life. Illness strikes wonderful people bringing about tremendous pain and suffering. Jobs are lost and good, hard-working people fall into financial bankruptcy. Children of fine Christian parents fall away from God and they become involved in lives of moral decay, drugs, alcoholism, and all of the accompanying pain of a hopeless life. There is nothing fair when good people have to suffer!

How can a couple move forward in their grief when life has been so unfair in taking away the child they so desperately wanted? As cruel as this might sound, there must come a day when we acknowledge the fact that life has many unfair circumstances, including miscarriage. Coming to the point of the acceptance of this fact can be an agonizingly slow process.

Often, in our pain, we don’t “feel” God’s presence; therefore we feel He doesn’t care. We place too much confidence in feelings, and too little in the promises of God. Feelings of abandonment and complete loneliness are normal feelings in the early weeks of grief. As we look around us, we will come to understand that life holds a lot of unfairness for all people, not just us. That one basic understanding and acceptance that a miscarriage has not just singled you out, but is a part of life, is a giant step forward in the long, difficult journey of grief.

Miscarriage is not one of the fair things in life, but it does happen frequently. Many thousands of couples will suffer through the pain of miscarriage each year. Understanding that you are not alone in the grief from this child loss is that crucial beginning point of your walk towards healing in this process we call grief. Be assured that you are not alone, and that there will be a day when you can say that even though life has been unfair in some things, there is still joy in most things.
http://www.silentgrief.com/articles/index.cgi?view_records=1&Category=Miscarriage&ID=29

Telling Others of Your Loss

Written by Clara Hinton | Oct 14, 2001

A miscarriage is devastating news to the couple who has lost the baby. It is extremely

difficult to hear those most dreaded words, “I’m sorry. The baby has died.” It is not unusual to live in a fog for a few weeks following the news of a miscarriage until there has been time for the reality and acceptance of the loss to settle in. Losing a baby is painful news to digest!

Grieving child loss is hard work and takes time. Every area of your life is affected by child loss, including your marriage. Because there are such differences in the ways men and women express their grief, for a period of time a husband and wife may pull away from each other to do their own private grieving of the loss of their baby. Eventually, healthy grieving brings the parents back together and they realize that “facing the truth together is not nearly as difficult as facing it alone.” (Silent Grief, page 98)

One very difficult task in grieving a miscarriage is finding the strength to tell others of the loss. When a mother and father are lost in the grief of losing their baby, it is often so painful to talk about the loss that for a period of time neither parent wants to mention the loss. But, one thing still remains – the task of telling others that the pregnancy has ended.

How do you tell friends and family members you have lost a baby when you are still in shock and the loss has not even become real to you? Who tells others that you are no longer pregnant? Who will understand your grief and your hesitancy in wanting to talk about the loss? These are all valid questions that deserve our attention.

There are no rules of etiquette for grief to follow. And, there is no right or wrong time or way to tell others of your loss. It is somewhat easier today to tell the heartbreaking news of the loss because some states are now issuing death certificates for babies who died as a result of a miscarriage. This provides an excellent opportunity to name your baby, and to say to others, “Our baby Rose died on June 11.”

Most parents today, though, do not choose to name their miscarried babies. This concept is still very new, and not widely practiced. Parents usually come to an understood agreement to share the responsibility of telling others the news of their loss. Fathers find it easier to be the ones to give the news at their place of work. Mothers are usually the ones to call the church, family members, and friends and give them the sad news of the miscarriage. By sharing the burden of telling others the news of the loss, you have shared as a couple in the difficult job of beginning your journey of grief together. Remember – you have the final say as to when and how to share this news of your miscarriage.

Try to remember that every time you say the words, “We lost the baby” you grow further along in your ability to accept the loss as being real. Also, every time you repeat the news of your loss, you validate your baby as being real. This will help you tremendously in the difficult journey of grief. As you share in this task of telling others of your baby’s death, you will be drawn closer together as husband and wife, allowing you to move forward in the healing process of your grief.

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I Know Exactly How You Feel

Written by Clara Hinton | Oct 05, 2001

In our attempts to help someone deal with the loss of a child, we often say things without giving the words much thought. To the parent grieving a loss, words can be the only thing they have to cling to in the early weeks of grief. The words that come from the mouths of friends will be remembered for a long time to come, and some thought should be given as to what we say before we speak. In our attempts to help, often we are careless and end up hurting instead of helping.

Maybe because miscarriage is a common form of early child loss affecting as many as 200,000 couples in America each year (Silent Grief by Clara Hinton) we take it a bit too lightly and we often say things without really thinking what our words mean. Many parents who have lost a child will say the worst thing ever said to them were the words most of us have carelessly spoken, "I know exactly how you feel".

Grief is a sensitive topic, and the way a parent grieves child loss is highly individual. We are taught that there are specific steps to follow in grief, but the truth is that nobody ever follows the pattern completely by the book. There is no timetable for grieving. There are no concrete rules that apply. One thing is absolutely certain, however. Nobody knows exactly how another person feels because grief is as personal as our own fingerprint!

When a miscarriage occurs, there are many losses that take place all at once. Parents don't have pictures and scrapbooks filled with memories to help ease their pain. There are no special toys the baby played with to be put in a special place to provide comfort. There are no reminders of fun birthday parties and visits to the zoo. The hope of those times spent together as a family was taken away very quickly, almost always without warning. To have another person say, "I know exactly how you feel" often sparks anger in the hearts of grieving parents.

Because we don't know how intense the bond of love was between mommy and baby and daddy and baby when a miscarriage occurs, we cannot possibly know the depth of pain the parent feels over this loss, their precious baby. So, what can you say that will help bring comfort?

The best thing we can say is to speak words directly from the heart. A good place to begin is by saying, "I cannot even begin to know how you must hurt right now." These words of compassion are enough to speak volumes to grieving hearts. Parents need to know that you cannot ever fully understand the depth of their pain, but you accept the fact that their hearts are hurting more than they ever thought possible.

We need to be sensitive to the feelings of parents who have suffered a miscarriage, letting them know that we do not fully understand how they feel, but our hearts hurt, too. You don't have to say a lot of words to express your heartfelt sorrow. Learn to be a good listener. Allow the parents to express what they are feeling. Remember that it's okay if tears fall. Above all else, when in doubt as to what to say, don't say anything. Just pull up a chair and sit beside your friend. Plain and simply put, parents who have lost a child just

need a friend to be there!

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Could This Be Depression?

Written by Clara Hinton | Sep 24, 2001

"Early child loss is probably the easiest to be dismissed by others, especially in the case of miscarriage." (Silent Grief, page 67) For the parents of the child, though, there are new emotions to deal with every day. The assumption that you will feel completely better in a few weeks is wrong, and often this misconception only adds to the intensity of a parent's grief.

At times, the disappointment a miscarriage brings will seem like it is more than you can bear. You were ready for a baby. You were daydreaming about how happy the holidays would be with a newborn baby. Every store you walked into seemed to be stocked with baby items such as cradles, soft blankets, cuddly pajamas, and precious knit booties. You were already envisioning yourself holding the baby- "your baby."

When miscarriage occurs, the loss generally happens with the sneakiness of a thief who snatches the precious life away without warning. There is no time to prepare yourself for the pain and emptiness, so the grief hits your heart with tremendous force leaving you weak and wounded.

There usually is not much open sharing time of grieving for a miscarriage because most people around you don't recognize the loss as being that terrible. In fact, a lot of your friends and family members may not yet have received the news that you had a baby on the way. So, it is only to be expected that others will not grieve this loss in the same way as you.

Some parents are able to move forward in a few months, experiencing only mild symptoms of depression. Others, however, seem to get stuck in this grief and just can't see any signs of hope. It is at this point we need to seriously ask ourselves if this could be more than grief. Could this be depression?

Grief acts like depression in many ways, and can be very similar in mimicking symptoms. If you find that after several months you are still feeling quite hopeless, helpless, and worthless, you might want to ask yourself some important questions. Are you constantly tired and unable to concentrate? Do you have great difficulty making decisions? Are you constantly restless and irritable? Have you experienced changes in appetite or weight? Have you lost interest in everyday activities? Do you ever think of death or suicide?

Depression is common in child loss, and help is readily available. If you are feeling much worse as the weeks pass, instead of feeling better, please visit your doctor. She can talk to you further to discuss the possibility of depression and a course of action to help you.

Grief from child loss can be the most strenuous, difficult journey you will ever have to take. If you suspect depression, please talk to your doctor and get the help that is available. By recognizing the symptoms of depression early, you will be able to receive help and move forward in your journey of grief towards hopeful living once again.
http://www.silentgrief.com/articles/index.cgi?view_records=1&Category=Miscarriage&ID=19

Lost Dreams

Written by Clara Hinton | Aug 28, 2001

The very first thing a couple does when news of a pregnancy is confirmed is to begin to dream. Will we have a little boy or a little girl? What will the baby look like? What are some favorite names? Will the baby have lots of hair? Hours and hours are spent discussing these topics and dreaming about how things will be.

The first sonogram picture-fuzzy and gray-looks beautiful to you. In fact, it becomes your most prized possession. You stare for hours at a time wondering if he'll have his mommy's smile or his daddy's dimples. You dream together about how tall he'll be and how fast he'll run from second to third base in his first Little League game. Dreams are wonderful!

When that first fluttery kick is felt, you feel like shouting from the top of the tallest building, "My little one is the best kicker of all!". Every conversation is colored with vivid dreams and hopes of who your little one will be.

When miscarriage occurs, the pain is felt like a searing hot iron pressing against your heart. The hurt, at times, feels unbearable. Once you hear those most dreaded words, "I'm sorry. Your baby didn't make it," all of life is covered by a cloud of despair. In just a few brief moments, those wonderful dreams of days spent with your little one vanish. Miscarriage is cruel.

Miscarriage not only robs you of today's joy, but it steals away your future. Instead of having hours of happy, excited conversation, you sit in silence not knowing what to say—not even wanting to say a word. The dreams are gone. Your future has been swiftly taken away.

Moving forward in life following a miscarriage is extremely difficult. Most parents will feel a strong bond of love formed with the baby at the very point of conception. A mother looks at every picture of a baby in a magazine with growing anticipation, while daddy sneaks into the toy store and buys baby's first football. Miscarriage steals dreams away, and it's so hard to move forward without your baby—the very center of all of your thoughts and dreams.

When a miscarriage brings an abrupt end to your dreams, take time to mourn the loss. Spend as much time talking together with your mate about your loss as you did planning for the future with your baby. Express your feelings of loss openly. Cry together as you come to terms with the fact that your baby died.

Finally, do something meaningful to help in the grieving process. Write a poem in memory of your precious baby. Plant a special tree as a symbol of your baby's memory living forever. Name your baby so that you will always have a very real part of your dream with you.

As painful as it may seem to you at the time, each day spent working through your feelings of lost dreams is a step closer in your journey towards healing and hope. Remind yourself often that grief is hard work. It's okay to take your time on the most difficult path you'll ever have to walk. You can never attain your original dream before the miscarriage occurred, but you can remember your dreams one day with fondness. Walk your journey of grief slowly, remembering that you will make it!

http://www.silentgrief.com/articles/index.cgi?view_records=1&Category=Miscarriage&ID=5